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ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, part-time employment of adult women has grown twice as fast as full-time employment. The most rapid gains in labor force participation rates of women have occurred among wives under 35, and especially among those with children under 6. At the other end of the age range, part-time employment is also a very desirable option. Despite this growing interest among women for more opportunities for part-time employment, there is a dearth of good part-time jobs. The author points to the most pressing research need which is the need to show that a variety of jobs can be handled successfully on a part-time or flexible hours basis, and that there are real, measurable benefits to firms which more than offset any administrative inconvenience. The author points to reduced absenteeism and turnover and increased efficiency. Perhaps the greatest research need in this area is to show that less rigid employment patterns across job categories are as beneficial to employers as they are to employees. Flexibility in scheduling is not inconsistent with output requirements. (Author/PC)

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PART-TIME WORK AND FLEXIBLE HOURS EMPLOYMENT

by Carol S. Greenwald*

Let me begin by briefly outlining the present situation for part-time workers. I am going to focus my remarks on part-time work because there are no data available on flexible hours employment other than part-time employment.

Over the last decade, part-time employment of adult women has grown twice as fast as full-time employment. From 1963 and 1973, part-time employment of adult women grew by 54 percent compared to a 28 percent increase in full-time employment of adult women and a 14 percent increase in employment of adult men.¹ In 1973, there were 30 million adult women in the civilian labor force,² of whom 6.7 million were either working part time or seeking part-time employment.³ Currently, somewhat more than a fifth of all adult women workers⁴ and a third of all working mothers are working part-time,⁵ but many more women would enter the labor force if there were more and better part-time jobs.

Part-time employment is especially attractive to women with young children. Fifty-five percent of all women who work part time have pre-school or school-age children.⁶ In recent years, the most rapid gains in labor force participation rates of women have occurred among wives under age 35, and especially among those with children under 6.⁷ This is the group of women who most desire part-time

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opportunities. Many of these women can be described as having a strong labor force attachment, but need a more flexible work schedule than provided by the rigid 9 to 5 day.⁸

At the other end of the age range, part-time employment is also a very desirable option for older women. These women can generally be described as not thinking in terms of careers. They want to work because they need the money and/or outside stimulation but, due to other interests or their age, do not want to be committed to a full-time job.

Despite a growing interest among women for more opportunities for part-time employment, there is a dearth of good part-time jobs. Outside of teaching and nursing, it is extremely difficult for women seeking professional employment or jobs with responsibility to find part-time work. Most part-time opportunities are limited to clerical office work, jobs as retail sales clerks, waitresses and cleaning workers. In blue-collar work, only the garment trades have tried to accommodate part-time workers on a large scale.

Even when they find employment, most part-time workers do not receive the same benefits, even on a pro-rata basis, that full-time workers receive. A special Area Wage Survey conducted in 1972 found that only half of part-time workers received a prorated portion of the paid holidays and vacations received by full-time workers.⁹ Life and health insurance coverage were not usually provided for part-time workers. Less than a quarter of the part-time workers were in establishments which provided pension benefits

to part-time workers. In addition to this wage cutting through denial of benefits, the survey found that many part-time workers earned lower hourly wage rates than full-time workers.¹⁰

The Area Wage Survey as of next month will exclude part-time workers from all coverage under the Area Wage Survey program, ostensibly for lack of funds. Rather than excluding part-time workers, the Survey should collect data and break out the data on part-time employment.

We have been asked to focus our remarks this morning on identifiable research needs in our individual areas. I have written several articles that have presented the argument, and I quote, "that employers should be expanding part-time work opportunities in order to attract women of exceptional ability, reduce absenteeism, cut overtime costs, and increase efficiency."¹¹ Now I believe that these benefits will accrue to firms that broaden part-time or flexible work options, but there is very little proof beyond my saying so.

The most pressing research need is to show that a variety of jobs can be handled successfully on a part-time or flexible hours basis and that there are real, measurable benefits to firms, which more than offset any administrative inconvenience.

One set of research projects, therefore, should locate women who work part-time or on a flexible hours basis and analyze the characteristics of the job and/or of the woman which made it possible to handle this job on a less rigid schedule. The point here

would be to see if there aren't general characteristics of jobs presently open to flexible employment patterns which really characterize other jobs which have been held to more rigid job classifications. This would also entail some detailed examination of job requirements of positions not now generally open to flexible hours employment. I'm thinking specifically of administrative and management positions. One should include in this an examination of stated education and experience requirements to see if they are really necessary to do this job. Often, women lack the stated job requirements but have the necessary capabilities that the job actually entails.

Many business people would concede that a member of the research staff could work on a flexible hours pattern, but they would argue that a supervisor could not. Now, I know that this is not necessarily true because I am an assistant vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and I work on a part-time schedule. I have changed my hours a number of times over the last 3 1/2 years, but currently I work from 9:30 - 2:30 every day, except for days when I attend conferences.

The usual argument against a part time manager is that the manager must be there at all times to solve problems and to direct workers. We need studies to determine exactly how many hours in the day an officer or manager is directly involved with his or her subordinates and how much time he or she spends not directly supervising. It seems to me that I am more available to my subordinates than

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my boss, the Director of Research, is to me and that while I am officially in the office only part of the day and he is officially in the office all day, he actually spends less time in the office than I do; i. e., he's at meetings, conferences, committees, etc. Now it is true that management jobs require a certain amount of luncheons and committee meetings, but one should not be able to argue at the same time that one can't be an officer or a manager if one is not in the office from 9 to 5. But we need studies to show exactly what is involved in management. It may be true that some types of management positions are not capable of flexibility in hours. But certainly some management positions are, and we need studies to delineate the characteristics of those that are.

A second set of research projects is needed to measure the benefits to the firm of flexible hours employment. I have cited reduced absenteeism and turnover and increased efficiency. We need actual studies to measure turnover rates, absenteeism, productivity. There is only one study that I am aware of which actually tried to measure the benefits of part-time professional workers. In 1969, the Massachusetts Department of Welfare hired 50 caseworkers on a half-time schedule. An independent study made 6 months later by a consulting firm indicated that these social workers handled 89 percent as many cases as full-time workers, thus once again proving Parkinson's Law that work expands to fill the time given to do it. Moreover, the turnover rate among the part-timers was only one-third of their full-time colleagues. We need many more studies like this one of firms that have part-time workers.

When I was lobbying in the Massachusetts legislature for a bill that would open state jobs for part-time or flexible hours employees across job classifications, the big selling point was this Welfare Department study. Employers want to see productivity measures and there are enough women now working part time that we should be able to produce many more such studies. Of course, we need to do careful research. We don't want to produce turnover rates for part-timers that are distorted by including teenagers looking for summer or after school work. What we need are studies that focus on adult women with a labor force attachment, who for personal reasons choose not to work full time.

It would not seem inappropriate to me for the Women's Bureau to promote experiments like the one I cited in Massachusetts in order to measure turnover and productivity. If one is giving out money to researchers to study a subject, it seems appropriate to spend some money on organizing an experiment. One might even begin right here in BLS and hire 20 percent of your new statisticians on a part-time or flexible hours basis and measure their performance against the other 80 percent new employees hired on rigid work schedules.

There has been growing interest in more flexible work schedules without changing the actual number of hours worked. From the articles I have seen, government workers, especially municipal workers, have led the way.¹² My impression is that most flexi-time schedules have given very little flexibility. Usually, one is limited to

choosing a work schedule from 8 to 4 or from 9 to 5 and can vary that choice periodically. For example, Hewlett-Packard Co., which was the first big U. S. company to adopt flexi-time, now lets its workers start work between 6:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. and quit 8 hours later. Recently, the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Co. in Boston, the first big convert to the 4-day work week, in April announced that those employees who did not opt for the 4-day work week would be allowed to work any 8-hour period between 7:30 a.m. and 5:10 p.m., provided they all work a core time of 9 a.m. to 3:40 p.m. Flexi-time workers can take an early shift one day and a later shift the next, provided their department manager agrees. Both of these companies would provide good case studies of a limited flexible hours work schedule. The highly publicized option where all employees work a core schedule, say from 10:00 to 11:30, and 2 to 4, and then fit their required hours in around this, is not nearly as widespread.

But everything known about flexi-time is very impressionistic. There are no BLS data on flexi-time. There is a need here for some special surveys to collect data on how many people are affected by flexi-time schedules, what are the patterns, in what industries and occupations are they being tried and, most importantly, productivity measures before and after flexi-time was instituted. Again, an analysis of the characteristics of jobs which are successfully handled in this manner would be important.

The greatest need in this area is for research to show that less rigid employment patterns across job categories are as beneficial

to employers as they are to employees. Professor Paul Samuelson has pointed out that in contrast with our "freedom in the spending of the money we earn, the modern industrial regime denies us a similar freedom in choosing the work routine by which we earn those dollars ..."¹³ We need research to show that greater flexibility in scheduling is not inconsistent with output requirements.

Women Working Part Time, by Occupation*

Professionals, Technical	1,304,591	Operatives, except Transportation	864,551
Registered nurses	230,441	Assemblers	71,213
College and university teachers	62,302	Checkers, examiners, inspectors	50,070
Elementary school teachers	333,436	in manufacturing	
Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers	62,643	Packers and wrappers excluding meat and produce	71,216
Secondary school teachers	120,750	Sewers and stitchers	201,453
		Misc. machine operators	55,191
Managers and Administrators	163,441	Transportation Equipment Operators	69,722
Sales Workers	996,316	Laborers	157,002
Hucksters and peddlers	80,190		
Sales clerks, retail	700,697	Service Workers, except Private Household	1,871,530
Clerical and Kindred Workers	2,526,615	Cleaning service workers	245,570
Bookkeepers	304,075	Food Food service workers	914,923
Cashiers	324,752	Nursing aides, orderlies	135,650
File clerks	79,828	Child care workers	51,960
Library attendants and assistants	56,029		
Office machine operators	71,165	TOTAL	8,677,580
Receptionists	90,640		
Secretaries	532,710		
Teachers' aides	67,949		
Telephone operators	81,346		
Typists	230,448		
Craft and Kindred Workers	96,306		

* Occupations listed when over 50 000 women work part time.

Source: 1970 Census of Population: Occupational Characteristics, PC(2) - 7A, Table 45

FOOTNOTES

1. Data derived from: U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Handbook of Labor Statistics 1973, Table 21 and Employment and Earnings, Vol. 20., No. 7, January 1974, Table 5.
2. Employment and Earnings, January 1974, Table 1.
3. Ibid., Table 5.
4. Ibid., Derived from Tables 1 and 5.
5. Elizabeth Waldman and Robert Whitmore, "Children of Working Mothers, March 1973," Monthly Labor Review, May 1972, p. 52.
6. Telephone conversation with Division of Labor Force Studies of the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
7. Waldman and Whitmore, p. 52.
8. See Catalyst, Flexible Work Schedules, A Catalyst Position Paper, 1973 for a discussion of a variety of flexible work schedules for permanent part-time employees.
9. Robert S. Daski, "Area Wage Survey Test Focuses on Part-Timers," Monthly Labor Review, April 1974, pp. 60 - 62.
10. See Catalyst, Employee ("Fringe") Benefits and Part-Time Personnel: How to Determine and Compute an Equitable Benefit Package at No Extra Cost to the Employer, A Catalyst Position Paper for Employers, 1973.

Carol Greenwald and Judith Liss, "Part-Time Workers Can Bring Higher Productivity."
11. See Carol Greenwald, "Working Mothers - The Need for More Part-Time Jobs," New England Economic Review, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, September/October 1972, pp. 13 - 22.

Carol Greenwald and Judith Liss, "Part-Time Workers Can Bring Higher Productivity," Harvard Business Review, September/October 1973, pp. 5 - 6.

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12. See Sam Zagoria, "Flextime - A City Employee Pleaser," Nation's Cities, February 1974, pp. 42 - 46.

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Lawrence Fellows, "German Workers Setting Own Hours," The New York Times, July 12, 1971, pp. 1, 10.

"Flexible Hours," Business Week, March 10, 1973, p. 49.

13. Paul Samuelson, Forward in Riva Poor (ed), 4 Days 40 Hours. Bursk & Poor Publishing Co., Cambridge, Mass. 1970. p. 8.